

Northampton Policing Review Commission: General Commission Meeting

MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, December 8, 2020
6:00PM -9:00PM
Remote Meeting

To join the remote meeting:

- **Video conference:**

<https://zoom.us/j/97150442047?pwd=RUM5ZzdMcERxMEFzK0hLMHR5WnBkdz09>

Meeting ID: 971 5044 2047 Password: 750785

- **Or by telephone, call: +1 929 436 2866**

1. Call to Order
 - Announcement of Zoom Recording
 - Roll Call
2. Public comment (30 minutes)
3. Announcement of speakers for commission and subcommittees
4. Discussion of improving outreach (Outreach Committee)
5. Continuation of tabled discussion: police attendance at commissions and subcommittees
6. Report back from the Public Hearing
7. Discussion of preliminary report
8. Discussion of anonymity during comments/submitting statements
9. Review of Minutes
10. New Business
11. Adjourn

1.MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Dana Olivo at 6:03 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ZOOM RECORDING

Commissioner Dana Olivo made an announcement that this meeting was being recorded for the public record and would be available on Northampton Open Media, as well as, the City of Northampton website.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens present
Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman arrived at 6:33pm
Commissioner Booker Bush present
Commissioner Dan Cannity (co-chair) present
Commissioner Nick Fleisher present
Commissioner David Hoose arrived at 6:27pm
Commissioner Alex Jarrett present
Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido present
Commissioner Dana Olivo (co-chair) present
Commissioner Nnamdi Pole present
Commissioner Michael Quinlan present
Commissioner Josey Rosales present
Commissioner Cynthia Suopis present
Commissioner Carol Owens : present

2. Public comment (30 minutes)

Community member Hannah Begley shared they did a practice called pod mapping about police. They explained police do not prevent crime, and the exercise is to imagine who you would call instead of the police. They said it's a great way to practice noticing their networks.

Community member Henry Morgan said they are organizing with Northampton abolition and said budget reallocation is not enough, and that putting money towards peer-led services is very important.

Community member Rye Buckley said they thought the Policing Policies & Services is headed in the right direction and encourages the committee to continue looking into alternatives to sexual assault, traffic issues, and surveillance. They encouraged the commission to be intentional when using the word "crime" and to think about different more intentional phrasing.

Community member Robert Eastman said people who don't call the police for their own safety are important to look into, as a way to be accountable and he supports the call for a very bold

cut for the budget.

Community member Ya Ping Douglass suggested caution around the word crime. They said that word was created socially constructed to oppress people and that saying crime on its own reinforces this myth that all crimes are harmful. They explained further, the phrase “the need for police”, or “people being safe” centers the perspective of people in society who are comfortable utilizing police. They suggested creating a process that centers accountability so there is always a place for people’s voices who are most impacted.

Community member Richard Hendrick read a written letter and in short, said he takes solace in the good of doing this work anyway, even when it is hard.

3. Announcement of speakers for commission and subcommittees

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said Sean Donovan and Patricia Schwarts came to the Alternatives to Policing subcommittee and wondered who might be coming to the next full commission meeting

Commissioner Dan Cannity said he reached out to Sean as well as activists who have been involved with other efforts to defund, one of which is Rachel Bromberg who is coming January 5th. He said he’s working on getting other people to come speak at the full commission meeting.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens mentioned Elisa Klein and wondered if she might be able come and talk about domestic violence.

Commissioner Dan Cannity explained Rachel Bromberg’s work and mentioned she does civilian led mobile crisis services work. He said he met with Alyssa and that he can invite her to speak to the commission as well.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher asked if it was Pam Schwarts who attended the Alternatives meeting. He asked for clarification about Alyssa’s work.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said Elisa Klein is a former city council member who has done work on restorative justice and domestic violence survivor support, and has a wealth of knowledge on restorative and transformative justice who can speak to how these programs are deployed.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens mentioned Alex Vitale who is a professor at Brooklyn College, who knows alot about policing, and could offer insight into policing work that might be relevant to the commission.

Commissioner Booker Bush said it’s valuable to bring speakers into the subcommittee meetings because it offers more room for in depth discussion. He wondered if it works better to have speakers at the large committee or at the subcommittees.

The commission discussed the best strategy of bringing speakers to the meetings.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido asked if the Policing Policies & Services committee has started looking into alternatives, which if that is the case, the commission should talk together

about this.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole confirmed Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido's statement. He said the Policing Policies & Services committee is documenting existing policies and decided it would be helpful to have a comparison to the Northampton department. He said they've begun researching one alternative to have context to drive the conversation forward. He said it is not as thorough as the Policing Policies committee and that it's helpful to have a control group to compare. He said it would be helpful to share information between subcommittees and that it would strengthen the work.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole said he is happy to share the research they've been doing.

The commissioners discuss keeping to the agenda and respecting open meeting law.

Commissioner Cynthia Suopis noted Elisa Kline was on her list and that she would like to be able to attend the subcommittee meetings with speakers.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said scheduling the meetings on the same night is something he would like to avoid in the future and agrees, the subcommittees are a good place for the speakers. He wondered how to access the recordings to the meetings and noted this is another way to hear the speaker.

Commissioner Booker Bush said it's difficult to get advance notice about a speaker but that he will email the commission to let people know.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said the small committee meetings seem better, and that getting notice will be helpful.

Commissioner Dana Olivio clarified that subcommittees will invite speakers and that if the commission would like a speaker for the larger group, there will be a list of folks they will invite.

4. Discussion of Improving outreach (Outreach Committee)

Commissioner Dana Olivo and Commissioner Dan Cannity introduced the idea of an outreach subcommittee working group that wouldn't meet quorum, who could dedicate some of their time to working on the communications outreach team, as it would require dedicated thought.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said the group would do outreach in a way that is not against open meeting law. He said anonymity with testimony is going to be important and that the commission needs to be intentional and conscious of its privilege, as they try to make this participation from the community more accessible.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett said he thinks this is a great idea and suggested the commission check with the City Solicitor about how to do this right. He said technically if people are tasked with something in their official capacity, that it needs to be a subcommittee and have posted meetings, however there is an exception with something called site visits.

Commissioner Dan Cannity (co chair) moved to table this discussion until the next general

meeting.

5.Continuation of tabled discussion: police attendance at commissions and subcommittees

Commissioner Booker Bush said he feels strongly that they need to invite the police to the conversation and said it's important to hear how they would describe their process. He said he doesn't think the commission could legitimately suggest alternatives without hearing about their process. He said it feels like the commission doesn't want to hear what the department is doing about this and that this doesn't feel like the best approach when they are about to recommend possible change.

Commissioner Dana Olivo clarified the agenda topic and said it feels like the commission has two different feelings about inviting the police and that discussing feels valuable.

Commissioner Josey Rosales said they don't feel like they need to invite the police, and that if they wanted to be involved, they would be at these meetings. They said they've asked for data which holds some information about what they do and how they do it. They said the lack of police presence feels like they are purposefully not engaging this group. They said bringing the police to the conversation would undermine and delegitimize the conversation because it puts the onus on the commission to reach out.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said he agreed with Commissioner Josey Rosales' comment. He said the police department is inherently a part of racist in white supremacist system and if people believed him, it would be great. But, he knows the reality of where we are. He said because of this, he wants to hear the police's narrative.

Commissioner Alex Jarret said he would like to invite the police as they are experts in how they are done now and that it would be helpful in framing their arguments. He said he reached out to members of the police department and that they indicated they would be happy to come speak, they are just waiting for the invitation from the committee.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole said this process will not be credible without an active effort to understand the police narrative as the data will never stand on its own. He named that there were police officers who attended the public hearing.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said when it comes to inviting police officers, he feels concerned that the commission would be inviting a body that is under review, into its own review process. He said what feels important is getting clear about what the commission wants to see, and designing backwards which doesn't necessarily have to involve the police as they are now. He said the commission can ask specific pointed questions and ask for clarification of the data, but he's unsure how much inviting them moves this conversation forward. He said there is also a power dynamic as police hold power over people and that there is a tension to figure out what that means. He feels concerned about the idea that not inviting representatives from the department means that work the commission presents is less legitimate. He said the commission should be clear about why, and if people are looking for a narrative, the commission could get it in written form as an alternative.

Commissioner Carol Owens said there's been a community organizing spirit that has created the need for the commission and carries the commission forward with all of their thoughts and resources. She said she would hate to go through this thorough reallocation process and have it

not operationalized because the commission never invited the relevant force to interview. She said she agreed the commission should have specific questions about processes which would be very revealing to the commission about how it feels about alternatives. She said institutional change doesn't happen only with community organizing, and that it has to do with examining all potential avenues forward. She said she's interested in delivering powerful bold recommendations to the city, and that it might boomerang on the commission if they don't have the narrative as well.

Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman said the commission is making a big mistake by not recognizing the commission's place within the institution and named that the commission doesn't have any power. She said the commission can offer recommendations which may or may not accept. She said all of the forces that have kept these oppressive systems in place have not gone away because there's a commission. She said bringing the police narrative isn't missing because it's everywhere. She said the commission has an opportunity to be a thorn, and make it hard for that narrative to continue as it always has been. She said there is a tremendous amount of power this force has to take our lives, freedom, and citizenship. She said the commission would be remiss to give up this tiny power by inviting more of this narrative into the conversation. She said she doesn't think this is worth the time. She said looking at the alternatives is the best bet, because no one else will be able to do this specific work at this moment.

Commissioner Josey Rosales agreed with Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman. They said it feels like bringing the police into the conversation is just to appeal to authority. They said it feels like the commission is settling to civility.

Commissioner Dan Canity asked what questions the commission would ask that they don't already know. He said he can't think of anything the commission doesn't already have information about.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said the legitimacy of the commission's recommendations does require some approaching of the police. He said one question might be able to find out their narrative around mental health.

Commissioner David Hoose said he agrees that bringing the police into the conversation is important for the legitimacy of the commission's work. He said he's only interested in hearing information from the Chief of Police. He said he's interested in asking what happens when the department gets a call that seems to be a mental health call. He said he would also like to know about property checks and what exactly the police are responding to.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said the police will be organizing an opposition to what the commission is proposing in the same ways police unions are fighting against the Policing Reform Bill. She said she's not in favor, but asking specific questions in a time limited way feels like the way to do it.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole said there was value in hearing comments on both sides of the issue during the public hearing because the commission wants to be able to offer alternatives. He said understanding what the police say is essential and will help the commission understand how they can replace specific services. He said, hearing the perspective doesn't mean accepting the perspective.

Commissioner Cynthia Suopis said she liked the thorn analogy. She said police departments

are talking to one another quite a bit about what is happening in this country. She said they know we're thorns and there are questions. She said she would like to ask the Police Chief whether she thinks the department needs to change and if so how, as well as what she would like to tell this commission. She said no matter what they do the commission will be this thorn.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said without being intentional about the way the commission asks questions, it doesn't seem like it will give the commission real information to move forward.

Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman said she would like to start to uncover the economic impact of a police force. She said people in their testimonies are talking about police jobs as good paying middle class jobs. She said she's been struggling with this point; that there are families that have been given this choice around making a good living for your family and policing your own community. She said there are pressures the communities we care about that are interested in how this system continues or thrives based on the benefits they are getting. She said the commission would be remiss if we didn't start to address or untangle some of these collateral effects.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said the Police Chief will not be able to answer the specific answers the commission would like to know. He said bringing the Police Chief would end up being a public relations exercise. He said the people for whom the system has worked are going to fight tooth and nail for it. He said he was stopped six times by the police because he is brown and the car was in his wife's name. He asked the commission to ask to think about those who the system has not worked and not just in their lives experience.

Commissioner Booker Bush said he still sees the value in inviting a member of the department to come speak to the commission because it will provide insight as to whether the police department will agree with some of the services for which the commission is looking to recommend alternatives, for example mental health calls.

Commissioner Dan Cannity referred to Commissioner Booker Bush's statement and said it sounds like Commissioner Booker Bush would like to hear from the police so that they can say they also don't want to go on mental health calls which seems like he is asking for validation from the police department.

Commissioner Booker Bush clarified and said he wants to know how the officers get pulled into the call.

Commissioner Dan Cannity asked if this is something the police officer is going to be able to answer. He said if the question is how do police get involved in these calls- he wondered whether an individual officer talking about an individual circumstance is helpful. He wondered what would answer this question in a helpful way.

Commissioner Booker Bush said there is a theoretical co-response to mental health calls in Northampton already. He mentioned Safe Horizons which deals with domestic violence calls. He said he wants to know how the decision occurs around why a social worker sometimes does not show up and vice versa under this co-response model. He would like to know how this happens. He thinks this is useful to ask this in this specific situation.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole said he's worried the commission may need a vote. He said he would prefer to have a vote to see how they stand as a commission.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said the police aren't going to be able to answer all of these questions. She said she doubts Jody Casper can talk about these systems and services and what systemically led us to this point.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett said he would like the commission to have the freedom in the subcommittees to make the decision to invite police or not. He requested to not make a vote to do any sort of restriction.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said he thinks Commissioner Alex Jarrett's comment is interesting. He said though there are concerns about the different narratives, he agrees the Police Chief is the only person he is interested in hearing from. He said that there are a thousand calls that the department does not respond to and said there is crisis response in Northampton that already diverts what goes to the police in other communities. He said these things would help the commission understand what alternatives there might be.

Commissioner Dana Olivo thanked the commission for their discussion and suggested moving on. She said if subcommittees would like to invite police to the subcommittee meetings, they can decide to do so.

6. Report back from the Public Hearing

Commissioner Dan Cannity said there were strong calls for recommendations. He said he is working on disentangling what it means to say "police responses" and "the police".

Commissioner Elizabeth named rape and sexual assault as things the commission should look into in terms of alternatives to police response.

Commissioner Carol Owens said she was struck by the informed information about the role of policing with unhoused people. She said it was horrifying to hear some of the testimonies during the public hearing about the human rights concerns in the downtown area including access to water. She wondered if any of the committees are focusing on people who are unhoused or who may be living in an encampment.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said this reallocation money is still not being used for these very things they could be used for like drinking water, places to use the bathroom, these basic human rights. There's 700,000 sitting there that people thought would be used and that there hasn't really been a forum for community members to say something about it. She wondered what the commission could do to compel the mayor to utilize this funding now.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett explained that the money that would have been taken from the Fiscal Stability Stabilization Fund to fund the police budget was not taken because of the cut, and that the city took \$300,000 from that fund recently to make up for the lost parking revenue.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens asked for clarification about the \$300,000 going to supplement the parking revenue.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett explained there was a lack of parking revenue and that the Fiscal Stabilization Fund would have been taken to fund the police budget but was not taken because of the cut and that the city took \$300,000 to make up for the lost revenue.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens asked for clarification about whether \$400,000 remains is available.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett said it's confusing and that he doesn't have the exact amount but that there's free cash (\$5.7 million). He said there is money to take action here and that is something the commission can put in the recommendations.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said the Budgets and Spending committee discusses this and that it would like to see the money spent now.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said the public hearing had a real impact on the Policies and Services committee and said it shifted the committee from looking at policies to looking at services, and the range of specific services. He said the committee found the public hearing very helpful.

7. Discussion of preliminary report

Commissioner Dana Olivo said the commission might be able to request an extension and would like to have a conversation with the commission about that.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said his committee would benefit from an extension to be able to have a draft because he doesn't see a unified understanding of how things should change.

Commission Nnamdi Pole said an extension would be welcomed. He said his subcommittee is starting a draft process, but that is a long way away from a coherent piece with all of the thoughts represented. He wondered what process has been effective in the past to yield such a report.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett said the City Council President and Mayor would probably be the people to grant extension. He said he's thinking of this more as a progress report to put the information he's gleaned from research and people without actual recommendations other than some possible ones.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said she thought the subcommittees would make a preliminary report and that they would be melded together into one report with consensus over the whole document. She said this is a whole other task.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said when he looks at the website, in terms of the preliminary and final reporting deadlines, he's reading it is that the report is not just miscellaneous information. He said the commission needs to note the direction the commission is starting to take.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said he read it as a progress report of what the commission has done this far. He said he's fine with asking for an extension, and said the commission has spent dozens of meetings doing work. He said he feels okay saying there are a lot of balls in the air they are juggling. He said he feels okay with reporting on as well as naming the tensions within the commission because there's not a shared end goal yet.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said he agrees with Commissioner Dan Cannity. He wondered if there is something the commission agrees on that could be put into the report. He said something that keeps standing out is for houseless people to have access to water and a restroom. He said there is some aspect of the budget left over from the 10% cut and wondered if the commission could include this into the report as a recommendation.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole said he also agrees with Commissioner Dan Cannity in terms of writing a report that holds the tensions, and serves as a summary about what the commission has done to date. He said he doesn't see this issue as focal to their charge. He wondered how to justify the focus on this especially as the commission has less consensus on policing reform.

Commissioner Josey Rosales said they think it's important to include houseless people as people in Northampton the police should serve. They said they are one of the populations within the city that has been most overpoliced and has suffered negatives and that it makes sense to reallocate those funds to uplift these people. They said the creation of public water and restrooms gives people a space to be where they no longer need to be policed. They said police won't be getting calls about public urination if there is a public bathroom that is accessible. They said within this context, it feels like this is exactly within the commission's charge.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens agreed with Commissioner Josey Rosales and said these behaviors that people are doing are being criminalized are because they are unhoused. She said they're being arrested for these things because they have no choice. She said she thinks it relates to the commission's mandate.

Commissioner Booker Bush said this money should be reallocated to the homelessness issue. He said the problem with the way the budget was done by the City Council is that they took out the money but didn't say where it will be spent, which now it can go anywhere. He asked if it's important for the commission to say specifically where the money should be allocated versus simply saying the money should go "towards this circumstance".

Commissioner Alex Jarrett said the City Council had no power to reallocate the funds and that it could only cut the funds. He said city councilors made recommendations to the mayor but it ultimately was his choice. He explained, if the mayor were to recommend, the city councillors approve. He said it sounds like there's consensus that the commission wants to see this funded. He said within the necessary timeline, arguing for an extension seems wise.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said including this issue in the report emphasizes the seriousness of this issue in relation to policing in northampton.

Commissioner Michael Quinlan said he thinks the commission's recommendations should be specific. He said the Mayor realizes these issues are a necessity and mentioned the Resilience Hub project he has begun to fund. He said there is more immediate use of these funds than that and suggested the idea of looking at a building in Northampton that isn't being used, where there are a concentration of bathrooms that could be utilized. He said there would need to be staff hired to keep the bathrooms clean and safe, and that they would have to uphold COVID 19 precautions. He said he thinks the mayor is waiting for specific recommendations. He said a three week extension on the report means we're deeper into the cold season and that if the commission is going to make this recommendation they need to get on it and get this report done. He said not having people be policed for urinating outside is a part of what this group is tasked to do.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole said he finds himself shifting a little bit to understand that this issue is more central. He said thinking about the public comment there is input from the community and he wondered about writing a report that documents all of this information the commission has been getting from the community.

Commissioner Alex Jarrett said the commission can make communication to the mayor separate from the report. He wondered about requesting an extension until the January 7th City Councillor meeting which gives two full commission meetings (22nd) and (5th) to deliver a draft, give comment, and have an opportunity to take a vote on the final report.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said he is in favor of a short extension as well crafting a report with an introduction, a report back of what the committees are working on, avenues they are exploring, as well as sections which weave in public comments, research, speakers, and new avenues of info that are shaping the commission's work. He said the commission can also identify short term and immediate needs.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher asked for clarification on whether Commissioner Dan Cannity was suggesting the commission ask for an extension as well as also make a recommendation.

Commissioner Dana Olivo said she heard both responding to immediate need, and requesting an extension for January 7th.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said if the commission can do both, she'd prefer to make recommendations about services that need to happen now and not to wait.

Commissioner Dan Cannity responded to Commissioner Nick Fleisher to clarify. He said the commission can craft a letter that goes out anytime for immediate responses and doesn't have to be a part of the official report.

Commissioner Booker Bush offered two motions: Motion 1: To move the report and ask it be reported January 7th to the City Council and council chair. Motion 2: To offer a recommendation for immediate use of funding taken out of the budget with specific goals which will need to be discussed further before submitting a letter.

The motion to move the report and ask it be reported January 7th to the City Council and council chair was passed unanimously.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher said if extension is not accepted, the commission will need to write the report very quickly.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said he doesn't see why they would reject the request in good faith.

Commissioner David Hoose offered to seconds the second motion: To offer a recommendation for immediate use of funding taken out of the budget with specific goals

Commissioner Booker Bush seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Discussion of anonymity during comments/submitting statements

Commissioner Dana Olivo moved to table this topic to the next commission meeting. Commissioner Booker Bush second the motion.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said he would like to table this topic because it will be more relevant when the co chairs hear back from the city about a creation of the working outreach group.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said he reached out to the City Council President and heard back that there is not a requirement to identify people and that the commission can accept anonymous comments in different ways. He said there's no accountability with anonymous comments which may be problematic depending on what those comments are. He said the commission can decide how it would handle anonymous comments for people who fear retaliation. He said the commission will need to figure this out collectively and to think about it while it's tabled.

9. Review of Minutes

Commissioner Dana Olivo motioned to approve the minutes from the full commission meeting November 24th, 2020.

Commissioner Nnamdi Pole seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

10. New Business

The commissioners discussed what to include on the agenda for the next meeting.

11. Adjourn

Commissioner Dana Olivo moved to adjourn. Commissioner Dan Cannity seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously at 9:06pm.